

West Virginia WIC's "Learning for Health" Project

Lesson #8

It's Family Time - Hassle-Free Dinners

This session will incorporate importance of eating together as a family, keeping the discussion and atmosphere positive and reinforcing the concepts of "parents provide - children decide when and how much."

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, parents/caregivers will be able to:

1. State at least one positive thing or a particular problem about dinnertime with their children/family.
2. Identify at least one thing they can change to make dinnertime more positive and enjoyable for their family.
3. Identify one new recipe or food they will try at dinnertime within the next 3 days.

Materials

- Lesson Plan Posters (2)
- Copies of Parent Fact Sheet (1 two-sided sheet)
- Easel, flip chart and colorful markers

Preparation

- Set up room in an informal way - chairs in a semi-circle if possible.
- Hang up the posters so all the group participants can see them easily OR attach the posters to an easel and show them at the appropriate time.
- Prepare supplies for one easy-to-demonstrate recipe from the fact sheet.

Introduction

- Introduce yourself and welcome everyone.
- Explain the purpose of the group and the estimated time.
- Have each group member share their name and have them share something about their dinnertime routine.

Discussion Questions

Can you think of some good reasons for your family to eat together as often as possible? What are some of the things you've heard about this?

Discuss the question with the group members. You can prompt discussion with the following points:

The Benefits of Family Meal Time

- Experts say that when families eat together, their children usually have improved academic performance and higher self-esteem.
- Dinner conversation can help expand a child's vocabulary.
- Sharing family meals also offers nutrition benefits. Parents serve as role models, letting their children observe them enjoying a variety of healthful foods.
- Children are more open to tasting new foods when they help prepare them.
- Even an occasional family meal can be successful. Make a commitment to sit down at the table family-style at least two to three times a week.

So, mealtime is important! Everything tastes better when you are happy, relaxed and part of a group. Young children enjoy eating in a happy, relaxed group, too.

What kinds of things do you do to make family mealtimes easier and more fun for everyone?

Write ideas on flipchart. Add to the discussion using some of these tips if not already shared by participants:

- Eat about the same time every day.
- Children like to know what to expect. Have breakfast, lunch and supper. Have snack times about halfway between mealtimes.
- Try to sit down together as a family to eat.
- When you can't do that, sit and talk with your child while they eat. Or at least be close by.
- Children eat better when it is calm and quiet.
- Turn off the TV. And don't fuss at your child at meal time!

- Expect your child to spill. All children spill. Just put a little bit in the cup or glass until your child passes this stage. Keep a towel handy.
- Don't argue with a child who doesn't want to eat!
- Your child may be tired, excited or just not hungry. Have they been snacking too close to mealtime?
- Stay calm! Wait until the next regular meal or snack time to give food. Children will eat when they get hungry enough.
- Put small amounts on your child's plate and cut food into bit-size pieces. This makes eating look easier.
- Give a new food when your child feels good.
- It helps if your child is hungry. Put a little bit of a new food beside a food your child already likes.
- Some days your child won't eat much. Other days your child will eat quite a bit. This is normal. It all works out if you are giving the right kinds of food.
- Children like food that is easy to eat. They like bright colors, fun shapes and mild flavors. They don't like food that is too hot or too cold. They like finger foods and foods they don't have to chew too much.
- Serve at least one vegetable and one fruit at dinnertime.

Activity

- Demonstrate one of the easy dinner recipes from the fact sheet.

Evaluation/Wrap-up

- Here is something that you might be interested in (hold up copy of fact sheet if not passed out already). It includes many of the things we talked about today.
- Who would like one? (pass out to interested participants)
- What things look familiar from our discussion today?
- What will you try tonight for your family dinner?
Have each participant share something they will try right away.
- Thank them for coming to the group and participating. Let them know that they can call you or stop by for more information whenever they wish.